

i-deal, i-craft, i-perform: A theoretical framework.

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ABSTRACT

Employees are becoming more responsive to the demands placed upon them in the workplace. Employees continuously seek ways to enhance their work performance. Notably, employees may put forward and negotiate certain work arrangements with their employer referred to as idiosyncratic deals. Employees may also alter the way in which they work, referred to as job crafting. The study is qualitative in nature and presents a conceptual paper. The paper presents a research model of idiosyncratic deals, job crafting and work related performance and sets out to identify research propositions that can be tested empirically. The study contributes to the literature of idiosyncratic deals and job crafting, and fills in the gap in the literature of these two variables by linking it to work related performance. Furthermore, the study puts forward propositions, which when tested empirically have the potential to enhance the way in which employees work, craft their work and increase individual performance.

1. Introduction

In the past decade, the practice of human resource (HR) management have transitioned towards greater individualization of work. (Rousseau, Hornung, & Kim, 2009). The way in which work has been performed has changed. Even so, the way in which jobs are designed have changed. Through these changing times, employees have engaged in proactive behaviors in the workplace, which are characterized as self-initiated and future oriented with a focus of changing work roles and hence, impacting individual performance.

The concept of i-deals has come in to play more recently, and has flourished over the last decade (Bal & Lub, 2016; Rousseau, 2001, 2005). Over the last decade, studies on idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) have increased and have been linked to job satisfaction (Rosen, Slater, Chang & Johnson, 2013), organizational citizenship behaviours (Anand, Vidyarthi, Linden & Rousseau, 2010), and organizational commitment (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2013; Liu, Lee, Hui, Kawan, & Wu, 2013). The premise of i-deals are the benefits derived between the employer and employee.

Based on the research model in Figure 1, the study intends to provide propositions in terms of i-deals and work related performance, and its moderating variable job crafting.

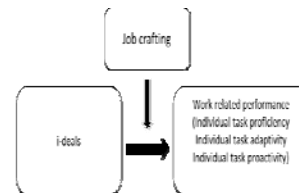


Figure 1: Research Model: *The relationship between i-deals and work related performance, with job crafting as a moderating variable.*

Proposition 1: *i-deals will enhance work related performance.*

Proposition 2: *job crafting moderates the relationship between i-deals and work related performance.*

Empirical studies conducted on i-deals have identified that employees respond in a positive manner when offered special work arrangements (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008; Rosen et al., 2011). Notably, i-deals bring about positive benefits to the organization and employees (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). However, there is a lack of empirical evidence about the effects of i-deals on individual's work role performance. A notable gap in the literature exists. There is an important need to address this because, without establishing a relationship between i-deals and work role performance, the return on the investment in allowing i-deals remains unknown towards work role performance.

2. Idiosyncratic deals

In the contemporary organization arrangements are made between the employee and their employer. Such an arrangement is referred to as i-deals (Rousseau, 2001). The concept of idiosyncratic deals relates to the type of personalized agreements made by employees (voluntary) to their employer and the personalized changes in work and employment conditions in a manner that benefits both parties (Rousseau, Ho & Greenberg, 2006). Such changes and arrangements are negotiated with their employer or its agents (Rousseau, 2005).

Furthermore, i-deals extends itself towards the changing nature in which work is carried out, flexibility in the work place practices and the rise of virtualization are among the changes which are likely to lead conditions for i-deals (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Tietze & Musson, 2003). Notably, the concept of i-deals are seen as the underpinnings from the social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Hence, such an

arrangement is based in the exchange relationship between the employee and the organization (Bal & Lub, 2016). In terms of i-deals in the workplace, it has been noted that it can be utilized to retain, reward or even recruit high performers (Conway & Shapiro, 2016). In addition, i-deals are characterized by providing mutually beneficial effects namely, improved work life balance and motivation, and work-life balance (Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2006; Hornung et al., 2008).

2.1. Theoretical background of i-deals

Rousseau's (2001, 2005) seminal work have brought much attention to the concept of i-deals. Research on i-deal have said to include, antecedents, consequences and the negotiation of i-deals (Hornung, Rousseau & Glaser, 2008; Rousseau, Hornung & Kim, 2009). In light of this, other studies have measured i-deals (Rosen, et al., 2013). The underpinnings of the way in which i-deals are operationalized in the workplace stems from the SET (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). The SET postulates that reciprocity in relationships, in terms of contributions and favors, are maintained even when one is not required to do so (Blau, 1964). Notably, i-deals hold a vital position in the employment relationship (Bal & Rousseau, 2016).

In terms of applying this theory in the context of i-deals, employees are likely to feel obliged to reciprocate through positive work behaviors. Notably, employees' reciprocation are likely to vary depending with whom they negotiate (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). Employees negotiate i-deals between themselves and their employers. I-deals are regarded as a way to reciprocate for employee's contributions. In terms of i-deals, the SET acts as a framework for explaining why employers are likely to grant i-deals to some employees and why employees with i-deals respond in the way they do.

2.2. Development of i-deals

The timing of i-deals may be negotiated at specific points of time namely, during the recruitment process (ex ante i-deals) or on the job (ex post i-deals). According to Rousseau et al., (2006), ex post i-deals transpire more often than ex ante i-deals. There have been empirical studies on ex post i-deals (e.g., Ho & Tekleab, 2013; Rousseau & Kim, 2006). Ex post i-deals have a strong focus on the SET which acts as an explanatory mechanism within the literature of i-deals. Once employees are hired, they are likely to negotiate i-deals as the exchange relationship with their employers begin. Ex ante i-deals refer to arrangements granted based on the individual's competencies and other characteristics that reflect their worth (Rousseau et al., 2006).

2.3. Characteristics of i-deals

I-deals can be characterized as *heterogeneous* creating an environment where people are treated differently in

the same organization and differ in the terms of agreement that differ with other employees. Employees may successfully negotiate i-deals, and might be perceived as favoritism by other colleagues (Bal & Rousseau, 2015; Rousseau, 2001). The negotiation of special arrangements creates an environment to be desirable by meeting the personal needs of employees and increasing the productivity in organizations. In hindsight, i-deals are characterized as *beneficial to both parties* (Bal & Rousseau, 2005; Guerrero, Bentein, & Lapalme, 2014; Ho & Tekleab, 2016; Rousseau, Ho & Greenberg, 2006). Arrangements negotiated may *vary in scope* namely, employees may negotiate career advancement opportunities versus flexibility (Bal & Rousseau, 2015).

The type of i-deals that may be arranged in organizations namely, *development i-deals* whereby employees customize their work tasks and negotiate special arrangements for training. (Hornung et al., 2009). *Flexibility ideals* refers to restructuring workload to meet individual needs. *Reduced workload ideals* refers to the way in which employees adjust their workloads (Guerrero et al., 2016).

3. Work role performance

Organizations operate in an environment that are continually changing and hence, the change in work. Employees are required to perform their work in a way that contributes towards the organization, as outlined in their job description (Chan & Rasli, 2013).

Work role performance refers to the cross-classification of the three type of individuals behavior namely, proficiency, adaptivity, and proactivity towards the effectiveness of an individual, team, and organization. In terms of the current study, it will look at the individual level. Work roles are defined as "the total set of performance responsibilities associated with one's employment" (Murphy & Jackson, 1999, p. 335). Notably, work role behaviors are perquisites to performance and in different situations such as organizations that are experiencing certain complexities or undergoing change (Neal, Yeo, Koy, & Xiao, 2012).

In terms of the current study, work role behaviors at and individual level refers to individual task behaviors (Griffin et al., 2007). This relates to behavior that contributes to individual effectiveness, namely:

- Individual task proficiency – refers to when core tasks of the job are completed properly. Employees display behaviors where they are able to meet the expectations and requirements of the job (Griffin et al., 2007) and is closely related to task performance (Johnson, 2003).
- Individual task adaptivity - the way in which employees are able to adapt to core tasks. Furthermore, task adaptivity refers to the way in which employees respond to and cope with

changes that affects their roles (Griffin et al., 2007).

- Individual task proactivity – when core tasks are done in a better way. Employees engage in future oriented behaviors characterized as self-starting required to change individual work roles, situations or themselves (Griffin et al., 2007).

4. Job Crafting

Employees are actively seek out the way they perform their job, as well as actively embark on changing the design of their jobs (Parker & Ohly, 2008). Such changes are referred to as job crafting which was introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). Job crafting is considered a proactive behavior that requires the adaptation to challenges and constraints posed by one's job. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 180) defined job crafting as "the actions employees take to shape, mould, and redefine their jobs".

The literature of job crafting contributes to the traditional job design theories (job characteristics) (Hackman & Oldman, 1980), and the interdisciplinary approach to job crafting (Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Hackman, 2010). Based on this premise, it is noted that job crafting explicitly focuses on job design and hence, employees are likely to be motivated through the design of their job. Oldham and Hackman (2010) noted there is great interest in the ways in which employees influence or shape their jobs. This is contextualized in the fact that employees have the flexibility to modify their jobs. According to Demerouti (2014), job crafting presents the case that organizations are likely to improve employee working conditions by encouraging them to craft their jobs.

In terms of the study, it sets out to note that employees in the workplace make changes to their job (job crafting) and hence, impacting their workplace related performance. According to Berg et al., (2013), job crafters reshape their work through: *Task crafting* – occurs when employees make changes to their set of responsibilities and hence, alter their job descriptions. *Relational crafting* – relates to how and when employees interacts within the execution of their job. *Cognitive crafting* - occurs when employees alter the way in which they perceive their work namely, tasks and relationships.

5. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature, and data is collected through various secondary data and presents a conceptual/theoretical based paper. The study reviewed various literature on i-deals, work related performance and job crafting. Notably, the study presents the opportunity for the constructs to be tested empirically.

6. Discussion

The study conceptualized the research model (Fig 1) and put forward two propositions. From the literature

review, it can be noted that employees negotiate certain arrangements with their employer (i-deals). From this, the study investigated the propositions made theoretically. Notably, i-deals and job crafting are regarded as job design initiatives. Moreover, it is likely that employees identify new ways to improve and make changes to their work. This type of improvements both refers to job design initiatives. I-deals relates to job crafting, and the latter involves employees altering their task or job characteristics on their own initiative to make their work activities meaningful (Demerouti, 2014). When employees are granted the negotiated arrangements, it is likely that to make proactive adjustments and customize their work activities. Hence, it is likely to increase employees' performance

Since job crafting is a proactive behaviour and leads to such outcomes, it is likely that job crafting may strengthen the relationship between i-deals and work role performance. Notably, employees that are granted i-deals with the expectation of performance (Vidyarthi, Singh, Erdogan, Chaudhry, Posthuma & Anand, 2016). Notably, job crafting and i-deals are similar as both proactively involves changing one's current task (Parker & Collins, 2010). It must be noted that employees craft their jobs without necessarily obtaining the consent of their supervisors (Berg et al., 2010). Conversely, i-deals are provided upon recognition of the immediate line manager (Rousseau, 2005)

Employees engage in proactive efforts and to some extent change aspects of their jobs. Given this, it should be noted that i-deals are negotiated with supervisors, whilst job crafting is self-initiated and hence, more likely to impact work role performance. This is consistent with findings of Rofcanin et al., (2016), which noted i-deals are positively related to performance outcomes. Thus, it can be noted that job crafting may enhance this relationship.

7. Recommendations and conclusions

There are limited studies on i-deals, job crafting and work role performance. It must be noted that by granting i-deals employees are more likely to adjust and customize their work requirement in order to meet their abilities and preferences, which has the ability to positive work outcomes such as work engagement, satisfaction and improved work role performance. The implications for organizations and HR practitioners, in terms of ideals and job crafting, are that these concepts are able to foster employee proactive behaviors, and enhance key performance outcomes. I-deals and job crafting can be utilized as strategies not only to attract talented employees but also to keep them committed and flourishing (Ng & Feldman, 2012). It is recommended that future research should entail in having the propositions tested empirically.

References available upon request.